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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5885
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3590
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3449
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4127
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSSU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001469

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [FAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [UNDP](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: UNDP WORKS TO BUILD ANALYTIC SKILLS
AMONG GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project to develop analytic capacity among government employees in Turkmenistan seems to be making progress toward its goal of improving policy planning skills at the Institute of Strategic Planning and Economic Development. In a November 2-6 training seminar, government employees debated topics of economic and social policy, including poverty levels and the impact of the global economic crisis in the region. That the Institute of Strategic Planning can call the UN and admit that it needs help with its work shows the level of trust that the Turkmen Government places in the UN.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The UNDP has been working with the Turkmenistan Institute of Strategic Planning and Economic Development since 2008 to build analytical and research capacity. The "Economics of Transition" training during November 2-6 was designed to stimulate thought and discussion among participants on topics related to economic development. According to Mary Risaeva, the program officer at UNDP responsible for the analytic capacity building project, many of the participants were from the Institute of Strategic Planning, but there were also participants from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economics and Development, Ministry of Energy Industry, Ministry of Nature Protection, and others.

¶3. (C) The Institute of Strategic Planning and Economic Development is responsible for designing strategies for socio-economic development in Turkmenistan. This includes analyzing demographics, labor relations, monetary and tax policy, and developing forecasts for the economy. In theory, the Institute is accountable directly to the president, but in practice it reports to the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for Economics and Finance. President

Berdimuhamedov in 2007 ordered the former Institute of Information and State Statistics to be split into the Strategic Planning Institute and the State Committee for Statistics (Goskomstat, in Russian). The problem for the employees who ended up at the Strategic Planning Institute was that their experience was in data collection and analysis. According to Risaeva, they had no experience doing research for policy planning and approached the UN for help. For instance, in 2008 Berdimuhamedov told the Institute to work on plans to develop the private sector. Institute staff immediately called Risaeva and asked for advice about how to proceed. Incidents like these were part of the reason for creating a program for analytic capacity development.

¶4. (C) Risaeva was pleased with the results of the seminar, saying that it stimulated debates among the participants. The topics that were the most hotly debated were levels of poverty since Soviet times, social policies, and the global economic crisis. Energy policy, by contrast, elicited less discussion, possibly because most of the participants agreed that the government should be responsible for natural resources and dividing the profits. Risaeva noted that there tended to be three camps of thought among participants: pro-Soviet, pro-Turkmen, and pro-modern. The pro-Soviet individuals approved of Soviet-era policies. When debating levels of poverty, this group was unwilling to accept that, as compared to world standards, the level of poverty in Soviet Turkmenistan was as high as 70 percent. For the pro-Turkmen people, it was difficult to admit any fault in the current president's policies. The pro-modern group were the ones looking for change.

¶5. (C) Risaeva said that although the seminar went well, during the same week, a new director of the Institute of

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Strategic Planning was appointed. She described the new director, who was the former Deputy Minister for Economics and Development, as "very Soviet." He apparently wants to reexamine all of the joint projects so that he can put his own stamp on them. Risaeva noted how difficult this kind of attitude made her work, but said that it was common that new directors of institutions in Turkmenistan wanted to redo the work of their predecessors. Projects are often viewed as belonging to the individuals that signed them into effect, not the institutions that participated.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: UNDP appears to have a very good relationship with the Institute of Strategic Planning. The Institute's request to Risaeva for help, along with similar experiences of other UNDP staff, confirms that the Turkmen Government views the UN as a trusted partner among donor organizations. The same trust extends to very few other foreign organizations in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

CURRAN